REASONS FOR FAITH

IN

REVEALED RELIGION.

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REASONS FOR FAITH

IN

REVEALED RELIGION;

OPPOSED TO

MR. HOLLIS'S

REASONS FOR SCEPTICISM;

IN A

LETTER TO THAT GENTLEMAN.

By THOMAS WILLIAMS,

Author of "The Age of Infidelity," &c.

FELIX—AND SHEW THE REASON OF A MAN.

YOU NO

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REASONS FOR FAITH:

A LETTER TO

JOHN HOLLIS, ESQ.

SIR,

SINCE you have thought fit to publiſh your doubts and objections to Revealed Religion, you will naturally expect the public attention to be excited, and will not, I flatter myſelf, be diſpleaſed to receive any anſwer, dictated by a ſpirit of candour, and expreſſed in moderate and reſpectful language:—requiſites claimed by the temper and ſtile of your publication, if there were no veneration due to the name of HOLLIS.

Your doubts will engender others; and your name and talents will give a weight and conſequence to ſcepticiſm, which may extend its influence. If my replies ſhould not give *you* ſatisfaction, if they are of uſe to others, by checking the influence of your dangerous ſpecu-

lations, and in confirming wavering believers, my time will not be ill beſtowed, nor my reaſonings in vain.

The candid manner in which you ſtate the workings of your own mind, and the progreſs of your opinions, does you credit; and more eſpecially your manly and honourable reſolution no longer, 'by a ſolemn and public act,' to declare yourſelf to be a chriſtian, while you diſbelieve Chriſtianity. Would to God your example were in this reſpect more followed! and that men would not aſſume this honourable name—this 'higheſt ſtile of man'—without the leaſt claim to it, either in their principles or conduct!

While I commend your candour and ingenuouſneſs, permit me to remark another principle, which ſeems to have been the parent of your ſcepticiſm, and to have led to the ſucceſſive changes of your opinion.

'During a courſe of years,' it ſeems, you conceived yourſelf 'to be a *rational* believer.' When the term *rational* is applied to faith, as reſpecting the grounds and authority on which we believe, it is well: we ought not to receive any ſcheme as a divine revelation without the moſt clear and convincing evidence: but when Reaſon is made the

the ſole judge of the articles of that revelation, after we are ſatisfied of its authority, I conceive ſhe is placed in an office to which ſhe is not competent; ſo that I do not wonder at the defection of ſuch believers as make their own reaſon alone the teſt and criterion of truth. In oppoſition to this, permit me to ſtate to you the method in which I was led to embrace that religion you have diſcarded.

Revealed religion being founded on written documents, the firſt thing to be inveſtigated, is their authority. If that can be proved divine, by arguments which appear ſatisfactory and unanſwerable, we ought not to reject the doctrines they contain, merely becauſe they are in ſome things myſterious, and above our reaſon, or becauſe we find it difficult, or even impoſſible, to reconcile them to our philoſophy, and preconceived opinions. In all our affairs we pay great reſpect to credible teſtimony, and reſt concerns of the firſt importance in this life upon it. Doctrines, if true, are but facts expreſſed in the form of propoſitions; and 'if we receive the 'witneſs of men, the witneſs of God is greater!' For my own part, even reaſoning *a priori*, I ſhould expect to meet with difficulties, incomprehenſibles, and even apparent inconſiſtencies,

in a Revelation from above, and that for theſe reaſons:

1. Comparing myſelf with the Supreme Being, and my own weak intellect with Omniſcience, I very naturally conclude, that many truths, which it may be uſeful for me to know, and proper for me to credit, may be above my limited comprehenſion, and inſcrutable to my weak reaſon.

2. Examining the book of nature, which has been very properly called the "Bible of Creation," I there, among ſome very obvious truths, meet with many difficulties, and ſeveral things which I can neither reconcile to each other, nor to my own notions of what they ſhould be. To give an inſtance: 'The Earth is filled with the 'goodneſs of the Lord—he preſerveth man and 'beaſt—and giveth to all their meat in due ſea-'ſon.' This commands my admiration and my gratitude; but when I conſider that, by the ſame divine conſtitution, the various claſſes of creatures ſubſiſt by torturing and devouring one another:—when I ſee the tyger attack the helpleſs kid, the falcon the harmleſs lamb, and the ſpider the ſilly fly, and aſk, Who is the author of thoſe cruel propenſities?—What can I

ſay?

ſay? I cannot reconcile this with my ideas of juſtice or propriety, much leſs with thoſe of infinite goodneſs and compaſſion.—I take up the volume of Revelation with the expectation of ſimilar difficulties, and am not ſhocked at finding them.

3. When I read the diſcordant opinions of philoſophers and naturaliſts, on ſome of the moſt familiar parts of 'the *material* word of God,' it prepares my mind for ſimilar diſcrepances among the interpreters of Revelation; and I neither reject the one or the other on this account.

Having thus ſtated the probability, that a divine revelation might contain difficulties, I proceed to examine thoſe you have found in the Chriſtian Revelation; after which, I ſhall offer ſome reaſons for believing, derived chiefly from the ſame topics which have furniſhed you with reaſons for ſcepticiſm.

I. Your firſt and grand objection to the Chriſtian Revelation, is derived from its *doctrine* of FUTURE PUNISHMENT, compared with that of *philoſophical neceſſity*, and contraſted with the known *benevolence* of the *Deity*.

I agree

I agree with you, that the puniſhment of *Hell* is repreſented in the New Teſtament to be final; and that the hopes which ſome have entertained of the reſtoration of the damned, are *viſionary*, and have not ſufficient foundation in the ſcriptures *. This I admit to be a very awful, and even *ſhocking*, repreſentation of the future ſtate of ſinners; eſpecially when it is conſidered, as you have ſhewn, that the far greater part of adult mankind are, and have been, walking in the broad road that leads to this deſtruction! — Being thus far agreed, I proceed to ſhew wherein we differ.

1ſt. We differ in reſpect of the number, and proportion of thoſe finally loſt. You ſuppoſe a vaſt majority of the human race, (according to the chriſtian ſcheme) eventually miſerable †; but ſeem to forget that one half of mankind, at leaſt, die in *infancy* or childhood.

The Scriptures, (as I have elſewhere endeavoured to ſhew ‡) independent of rational arguments, give us ſufficient reaſons to believe that all theſe are certainly ſaved; and to them may be added

* Reaſons for Scept. p. 7. † Ibid. p. 6, 7.

‡ *Infant Salvation*, an Eſſay to prove the ſalvation of all who die in infancy.

added *ideots*, and others, who, like them, are incapable of diſcerning good from evil.

I hope alſo, that many deductions might be made for perſons, whoſe lives indeed have been irreligous, but who were converted in the hour of ſickneſs and death. The ſcripture gives us ſome ſuch inſtances, and obſervation many more.—I alſo flatter myſelf with a great number of exceptions in the heathen and unenlightened world; not ſo much among the philoſophers, (moſt of whom were vain ſophiſts) as among the ſimpler claſſes. The poor Hindoo, the untutored Indian, the oppreſſed Negro, if at any time they have directed their cry to heaven with the heart, and in the language of the publican, have I doubt not been heard by him, who is no reſpecter of perſons;—for 'in every nation, he that feareth 'God and worketh righteouſneſs is accepted of 'him * †.'

But

* Acts x.

† That I may not be charged with a novel and unwarrantable attempt to ſoften the *gloomy* ſyſtem of Calvin, as it has been called, I beg leave to ſubjoin the following ſhort extract from one of its moſt zealous and celebrated defenders.—'Why 'are *Calvin's* doctrines repreſented as *gloomy*? Is it gloomy 'to believe that the *far greater part* of the human race are 'made for endleſs happineſs? There can, I think, be no rea-'ſonable doubt entertained, concerning the ſalvation of very 'young perſons. If about one half of mankind die in *in-'fancy*,—if a very conſiderable number of the remaining half

'die

But beſide all theſe, we are encouraged to look forward to a period of at leaſt a thouſand years, and that at no great diſtance, when the ſituation of the world will be greatly altered, and when inſtances of irreligion and infidelity will be as few, as now are inſtances of piety and faith *. Theſe conſiderations greatly alter the objection, ſo far as it reſpects the number of the miſerable: and ſufficiently demonſtrate that the whole company of the redeemed will be indeed a multitude which no man can number!

But if we farther indulge ourſelves in the pleaſing conjectures of modern aſtronomers, and ſuppoſe the innumerable ſyſtems of ſtarry worlds to be inhabited by pure and happy intelligences, then,

'die in early childhood,—and if (as there is the ſtrongeſt reaſon 'to think) *many millions* of thoſe who live to maturer years, 'in every ſucceſſive generation, have their names in the book 'of life: then what a very ſmall portion, comparatively, of 'the human ſpecies, falls under the decree of preterition and 'non-redemption!

'And I might have added, that the purpoſe of God accord-'ing to election, is not reſtrained to men either of any par-'ticular country, or age, or time, or religious denomination. 'Undoubtedly, there are elect *Jews*, elect *Mahometans*, and 'elect *Pagans*. In a word, countleſs millions of perſons, 'whom Chriſt hath redeemed unto God, *by his blood, out of 'every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.*' Rev. v. 9.—TOPLADY's *Chriſtian and Philoſophical Neceſſity*, p. 120, 121.

* Rev. xx.

then, perhaps, as Dr. *Doddridge* obſerves, 'the 'whole human ſpecies may be no more in the 'works of God, than an individual to the human 'race *;' and, conſequently, the finally miſerable may bear a ſtill leſs proportion to the happy.

2. We differ in our ideas of the *nature* and *degree* of future puniſhment. You ſpeak of the puniſhment of hell, as extreme and terrible, and ſo it is; but you ſeem not to have accurately obſerved the juſt apportioning of degrees of puniſhment, according to the degrees of crime, when every man ſhall be 'rewarded according to his works,' and ſome 'beaten with few,' and others with 'many ſtripes †.'—You ſeem alſo, I think, to conſider that puniſhment as arbitary, or depending on the will of the Supreme Legiſlator, like the puniſhments appended to certain crimes by human laws. I conceive the great God originally formed ſuch an eſſential connection between ſin and miſery, that nothing but his own mercy can ever ſeparate them. Thus, I ſuppoſe, that the poiſonous nature of the forbidden fruit, firſt introduced the ſeeds of death into the human frame. So the drunkard and the debauchee, by their intemperance, entail miſery and pain, both upon themſelves and their poſterity.

Now

* Doddridge's Lectures, Vol. II. p. 473. 3d Ed.

† Luke xii. 47, 48.

Now admitting the natural immortality of the ſoul, the queſtion is not, Whether it be juſt in God to make ſinners for ever miſerable? but rather, Whether his juſtice, or goodneſs, oblige him to diſſolve this original connection between moral and natural evil, and to work a miracle for the ſalvation of ſinners, after they have voluntarily plunged themſelves into deſtruction?

You ſtrengthen your remark on the future puniſhment of ſin, by comparing the doctrine of philoſophical neceſſity therewith; and it ſtrikes you with horror 'that men ſhould be puniſhed 'eternally for a conduct, which you conſider as 'inevitable *.' That God has a perfect foreknowledge of all events, and has even predetermined them in his own mind, is a doctrine ſtrongly expreſſed in many parts of ſcripture; but it is alſo aſſerted with equal clearneſs, that ſinners act voluntarily, and are by no means neceſſitated in any manner that affects the freedom of their actions, or leſſens the magnitude of their crimes. St. Peter has a ſtriking expreſſion on this ſubject in his addreſs to the Jews on the crucifixion of Chriſt—'Him being delivered by the DETER-'MINATE COUNCIL and FOREKNOWLEDGE of 'God, ye have taken, and by WICKED hands have 'crucified and ſlain †.'

My

* Reaſons, p. 10. † Acts ii. 23.

My object is not, however, either to prove or to explain these doctrines; but simply to shew that, admitting them both, they do not so clash as to form any just objection to the Christian system.

In the first place, the doctrine of necessity can no way affect the doctrine of future punishment, unless it be by destroying moral agency, and taking away the moral evil of transgression. If men continue free agents, and accountable for their conduct to their Maker, then are they still liable to punishment for disobedience; and supposing sin to have merited endless punishment, if sinners were under no necessity, they can merit it no less while the moral evil of their conduct continues to remain the same.

If indeed the doctrine of necessity reduces us to mere machines, incapable of moral agency, then it sets aside not only *eternal* punishments, but *all* punishments and rewards whatever, future or present; and it is as unjust and ridiculous to inflict punishment upon a thief, as upon a watch or a windmill.

Farther, if the doctrine of necessity set aside rewards and punishments, then does it also, in my apprehension, that of a future state, the most

eſſential character of which is, that it is a ſtate of rewards and puniſhments. Conſequently, this objection will deſtroy your hypotheſis reſpecting a future ſtate, as well as mine.

But ſo far is the doctrine of neceſſity from taking away the evil of vice, and the juſtice of puniſhment, that Dr. PRIESTLEY, and other able defenders of this ſcheme, deny the poſſibility of vice or virtue, reward or puniſhment, or any other *. Lord KAIMES ſays, very emphatically, that without it, 'Man would not be capable of 'either rewards or puniſhments, he would not be 'fitted either for divine or human government, 'he would be a creature that has no reſemblance 'to the (preſent) human race †.' Even Dr. PRICE, the great advocate of philoſophical liberty, is quoted by his friend PRIESTLEY, as confeſſing the ſame thing. In anſwer to an objection drawn from the inconſiſtency of virtue and neceſſity, he remarks, 'by the neceſſity which is ſaid 'to diminiſh the virtue of good actions, muſt be 'meant not a *natural*, but a *moral* neceſſity, or 'ſuch as ariſes from the influence of motives, 'and affections of the mind; or that certainty of 'determining one way which may take place 'upon the ſuppoſition of certain views, circum-

'ſtances,

* See PRIESTLEY on Philoſophical Neceſſity, Section vii.

† Sketches on Man, Vol. II. page 300.

'ſtances, and principles of an agent. Now it is 'undeniable, that the very greateſt neceſſity of 'this ſort is conſiſtent with, nay is implied in, the 'idea of the *moſt perfect* and *meritorious virtue*, and, 'conſequently, can by no means be what, of itſelf, 'ever leſſens it. The more confidently we may 'depend upon a being's doing an action, when 'convinced of its propriety, whatever obſtacles 'may lie in his way, or morally ſpeaking, the 'more efficacious and unconquerable the in-'fluence of conſcience is within him, the more 'amiable we muſt think him.

'In like manner the moſt abandoned and 'deteſtable ſtate of wickedneſs implies the great-'eſt *neceſſity of ſinning*, and the greateſt degree of 'moral impotence. He is the moſt vicious man 'who is ſo enſlaved by vicious habits, or in 'whom appetite has ſo far gained the aſcen-'dant, and a regard to virtue and duty is ſo far 'weakened, that we can at any time, with 'certainty, foretel that he will do evil, when 'tempted to it *.'

Now if *neceſſity* be that which chiefly aggra-vates the malignity of ſin, and, eſſential to its very being, it is ſurely inconceivable that it ſhould

* Quoted, Prieſtley on Neceſſity, page 60, 61.

ſhould make puniſhment appear the more ſevere. To ſuppoſe this would be tantamount to ſuppoſing, that the puniſhment of ſin ought to be leſs, becauſe its criminality is greater.

How far it may be fit for the Divine Being thus exemplarily to puniſh ſin, is not for us to judge: it would be preſumptuous to attempt it. Nor is it ſafe to reaſon from our own feelings. Our compaſſion is a compound of love and weakneſs; and we often remit puniſhment either from a ſenſe of our own infirmity, or from the pain it gives us to ſee judgment executed; but theſe things can have no place in God: his goodneſs is pure and unmixed, and his mercy perfectly ſpontaneous and diſintereſted.

We may, indeed, infer from the infinitude of the divine goodneſs, taken in connection with his power and wiſdom, that our ſyſtem of nature and providence is the beſt that could have been adopted: and that even the introduction of evil, both natural and moral, will be attended with advantage to the *ſyſtem*; but it does not therefore follow that advantage will reſult to *every* individual.

If we conſider God as the *parent* of his creatures, yet can we not therefore reaſon ſafely in all

all caſes from our own parental conduct and affections. There have been inſtances in which the beſt of fathers have been compelled to diſown and abandon their offspring through their exceſſive perverſeneſs and diſobedience: and who dare affirm that our heavenly Parent may not in ſome inſtances do this, in perfect conſiſtency with his divine perfections? Nay; who dare to ſay but that his divine perfections (his holineſs and juſtice, more particularly) may in ſome caſes even require this?

That 'all puniſhment ought to be ſo applied, 'that while it operates for an example it ſhould 'reform the offender *,' may be a *dogma* of modern philoſophy, but is not, I think, agreeable to the common ſenſe of mankind in general, who, in all ages and countries, with a very few exceptions, have thought that ſome crimes deſerve capital puniſhment, and ought not to be atoned but by the life of the offender. And there are certainly inſtances in which mercy to individuals would be cruel to ſociety at large.

Theſe hints are offered with a view of *ſoftening* ſome of the difficulties of the Chriſtian ſcheme; not with the expectation of being able wholly to account

* Reaſons, page 10.

account for them, or fully juſtify the divine conduct. We have ſeen there are difficulties in natural as well as in revealed religion, which cannot be accounted for in the preſent ſtate. Revelation, however, gives us this aſſurance, which nature cannot, that what we know not now, we ſhall know hereafter *. What I have ſaid, may be, I hope, ſufficient to ſhew that the ſcriptures do *not* aſſert 'that everlaſting miſery is 'the deſtination of the *great maſs* of human 'beings;' much leſs that the benevolent Deity 'created beings *in order* to make them miſe-'rable †.'

II. Your ſecond objection to Revelation refers chiefly to the Old Teſtament, and is drawn from the enjoined '*extermination of the Canaanites*;' as I have conſidered this at ſome length elſewhere ‡ I ſhall only recapitulate the topics of argument there employed. They are—The ſovereignty of God, and that he has an undoubted right to reſume the life he gave: that ſuppoſing men in innocence to have a claim on their

* John xiii. 7. See alſo 1 Cor. xiii. 9—12.

† Reaſons, p. 30, 36.

‡ *Age of Infidelity*, Part II. p. 26—31. I beg pardon for the apparent vanity of repeated reference to my own tracts; but as conciſeneſs is an object in a pamphlet, I flatter myſelf the reader will admit it to be a more venial fault, to refer to the arguments at length elſewhere than to repeat them.

their Maker for the continuance of life, yet we have all forfeited our lives by ſin: that this was particularly the caſe of the Canaanites, whoſe national character was extremely criminal and vicious: that the divine patience, notwithſtanding, bore with them from generation to generation, and at the laſt gave them the alternative of ſaving themſelves either by flight, or the renunciation of their idolatries; and commanded their deſtruction *only* in caſes of obſtinate reſiſtance, and perſeverance in idolatry and vice. I have added, that theſe nations were conſumed not merely by the ſword, but in part alſo by the immediate hand of Providence, which often deſtroys cities and nations eminent for wickedneſs:—and, in ſome inſtances, the deſtruction has been far more extenſive and terrible than what is here complained of.

The learned and worthy Biſhop of LANDAFF has ſince employed ſome of the ſame topics, in anſwer to the ſame objection. You think his arguments inconcluſive, and give your reaſons. I have not the preſumption to appear as his Lordſhip's advocate; but ſo far as your remarks affect alſo my reaſoning, I may be allowed to notice them. The prelate has compared the deſtruction of the Canaanites to the deſtructions 'brought on mankind by the operations of the

'laws of nature,' as in earthquakes, &c. when infants as well as adults have been involved in one common calamity. I had hinted at the ſame argument. You object to the compariſon, becauſe the one caſe is repreſented as the immediate puniſhment of heaven, the other as a calamity produced in the ordinary courſe of nature. In the one caſe children are neceſſarily involved in the fate of their parents, in the other they might be eaſily diſcriminated.

With reſpect to the puniſhment of children, I would remark, that if death itſelf be a puniſhment, children are puniſhed every day; if it be *not*, then the *kind* of death only conſtituted the puniſhment; and I cannot conceive the ſword of war more dreadful than a burning fever, or a waſting plague, eſpecially as infants could ſuffer nothing from apprehenſion.

I readily grant that the extermination of the Canaanites was a ſevere and terrible puniſhment to the parents; but if we admit the future happineſs of all dying infants, it will hardly be pretended that the ſparing of their lives, while their parents were deſtroyed, would have been a privilege or a bleſſing.

But

But if the juſtice of God required the death of theſe nations, why not deſtroy them by an earthquake, or peſtilence, or ſome other general calamity, rather than endanger the moral character of the Iſraelites, by making them a nation of executioners? It might be ſufficient to refer this queſtion to the ſovereignty of God: "He giveth "not account of any of his matters *."—But if the attempt be not too preſumptuous, I would hint ſeveral probable reaſons, on the part of God, of the Canaanites, and of the Iſraelites.

1. On the part of the CANAANITES, I have already obſerved, and have elſewhere endeavoured to prove †, that the Iſraelites were ordered to make them the tender of life and mercy, if they would renounce their idolatry, and acknowledge the God of Iſrael; and this command was backed with the moſt ſatisfactory evidence of its divine authority, in the miracles wrought in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the Wilderneſs; the fame of which ſpread rapidly among the ſurrounding nations ‡. But the earthquake, the tempeſt, and the peſtilence, give no ſuch warning.

2. On the part of God this method gave honour to his divine perfections:—his *mercy* in giving

* Job xxxiii. 13. † *Age of Infidelity*, Part ii. p. 28—30.
‡ Joſhua ii. 9—11.

giving ſuch an offer, and his *juſtice* in publiſhing the *cauſe* of his ſentence; whereas, in general calamities, the juſt and unjuſt periſh commonly together: and had they been deſtroyed by any ſuch judgment, a ſweeping peſtilence, for inſtance, themſelves might have ſuppoſed as well as you, that it was not a puniſhment, only a calamity.

3. On the part of the Iſraelites; they had hereby the fulleſt proof of that extraordinary Providence, under which they were placed, in the miraculous aſſiſtance afforded to their arms.

The Biſhop of Landaff adds, that God, in making the Iſraelites 'the executors of his ven-'geance—gave ſuch an evident and terrible 'proof of his abomination of vice, as could not 'fail to ſtrike the ſurrounding nations with aſto-'niſhment and terror; and to impreſs on the 'minds of the Iſraelites what they were to 'expect, if they followed the example of the 'nations whom he commanded them to cut off.' You admit the ſtrength of the impreſſion; but ſuppoſe that its tendency 'would be very per-'nicious.'

'By learning that it belonged to the charac-'ter of the governor and judge of the world, to 'inflict *cruel* and *unjuſt puniſhment*, they would not

'be

'be inſpired with veneration' for him; nor was it (you think) likely to teach them *humanity*, or juſtice *. This is well ſaid on the ſuppoſition, that the exciſion of theſe nations was *unjuſt*; but if, as it appears to me from the above conſiderations, that puniſhment was *juſt* in itſelf, inflicted by the higheſt *authority*, and accompanied with overtures of *mercy*, then I hope you will admit it was calculated to inſpire them with veneration for God, hatred to vice, and love to juſtice, if not humanity.

I cannot conclude this ſubject, as it reſpects the Canaanites, better than by reciting the following paſſage from a very ancient Jewiſh writing, traditionally, though I apprehend unjuſtly, aſcribed to Solomon: and which confirms moſt of the ideas I have advanced. 'O Lord' (ſays the pious Hebrew) 'it was thy will to deſtroy 'by the hands of our fathers both thoſe old 'inhabitants of thy holy land, whom thou hatedſt 'for doing *moſt odious works* of witchcrafts, and 'wicked ſacrifices; and alſo thoſe mercileſs 'murderers of children, and devourers of mans' 'fleſh, and the feaſts of blood; with their prieſts 'out of the midſt of their idolatrous crew, and 'the parents, that killed with their own hands 'ſouls deſtitute of help: that the land, which 'thou

* Reaſons, p. 18, 19.

'thou eſteemedſt above all other, might receive 'a worthy colony of God's children.

'Nevertheleſs even thoſe thou *ſparedſt* as men, 'and didſt ſend waſps, forerunners of thine hoſt, 'to deſtroy them *by little and little*. Not that 'thou waſt unable to bring the ungodly under 'the hand of the righteous in battle, or to de-'ſtroy them at once with cruel beaſts, or with 'one rough word: But executing thy judgments 'upon them, by little and little, *thou gaveſt them 'place of repentance*, not being ignorant that they 'were a naughty generation, and that their 'malice was bred in them, and that their 'cogitation would never be changed. For it 'was a curſed ſeed from the beginning; neither 'didſt thou for fear of any man give them pardon 'for thoſe things wherein they ſinned. For 'who ſhall ſay, What haſt thou done? or who 'ſhall withſtand thy judgment? or who ſhall 'accuſe thee for the nations that periſh, whom 'thou haſt made? or who ſhall come to ſtand 'againſt thee, to be revenged for the *unrighteous* 'men? . . . . . .

'Foraſmuch then, as thou art righteous thy-'ſelf, thou ordereſt all things righteouſly: think-'ing it not agreeable with thy power to condemn 'him that hath not deſerved to be puniſhed.

'For

'For thy power is the beginning of righteouſ-
'neſs; and becauſe thou art the Lord of all, it
'maketh thee to be gracious unto all. . . . .

'Thou mayeſt uſe power when thou wilt:
'But *by ſuch works haſt thou taught thy people that*
'*the juſt man ſhould be* MERCIFUL, and haſt made
'thy children to be of a good hope that thou
'giveſt repentance for ſins. For if thou didſt
'puniſh the enemies of thy children, and the
'condemned to death, with *ſuch deliberation*, giving
'them *time* and *place* whereby they might be
'delivered from their malice: With how great
'circumſpection didſt thou judge thine own ſons,
'unto whoſe fathers thou haſt ſworn and made
'covenants of good promiſes? Therefore, whereas
'thou doſt chaſten us, thou ſcourgeſt our enemies
'a thouſand times more, to the intent that, when
'we judge, we ſhould carefully *think of thy goodneſs*,
'and when we ourſelves are judged we ſhould
'*look for mercy* * !'

To proceed.—You think the caſe of the AMALEKITES peculiarly hard; and hard indeed it was, if, as you ſuppoſe, their only crime was, that '*they took up arms againſt their invaders*:' but, with your leave, we will examine the circumſtances of their hiſtory.

The

* Wiſdom of Solomon, chap. xii.

The Amalekites were not inhabitants of Canaan, but reſided on its borders. They were deſcendants of Eſau and of the ſtock of Abraham, and ſo far related to the Iſraelites. But when they heard that the latter were coming to take poſſeſſion of their long-promiſed country, though themſelves were not originally among the devoted nations, they were the firſt to meet and to oppoſe them; and there were ſome circumſtances (as we ſhall ſee immediately) which made their conduct peculiarly offenſive to the God of Iſrael, who therefore gave his people a great and deciſive victory over them, and afterward declared, that 'he would utterly put out their remembrance 'from under heaven.' Moſes therefore builded an altar, by way of memorial, and called it 'JEHO-'VAH-NISSI, the Lord is my banner: For he ſaid, 'becauſe the Lord hath ſworn that he will have 'war with Amalek from generation to generation.' —So our tranſlators, following the ancient Jewiſh commentators; but many others take the paſſage more literally, as in our marginal verſion. 'Be-'cauſe the hand (to wit, of Amalek) is againſt 'the throne of the Lord, therefore the Lord will 'war with Amalek from generation to genera-'tion!' If this be the true rendering, it implies that the Amalekites were acquainted with the divine decree in favour of Iſrael, and ſet themſelves to oppoſe it:—they 'lifted up their hand

'againſt

'againſt the throne of God *.' However this may be, there is no doubt but they were apoſtates from the religion of their father Abraham, that they ſymbolized with the Canaanites in their abominations, and united with the Midianites and Moabites to oppreſs the Hebrews †.

Therefore, when ſeveral years afterward they were about to enter the promiſed land, this conduct was recollected, and ſome material circumſtances were added in the recapitulation of their crimes. 'Remember what Amalek did unto thee 'by the way, when ye were come forth out of 'Egypt; how he *met thee by the way and ſmote the* '*hindmoſt* of thee, even *all that were feeble* behind 'thee, when *thou waſt faint and weary*, and he 'feared not God ‡.' So that it appears, Amalek not only acted in impious oppoſition to JEHOVAH, the God of Abraham; but alſo took a cowardly advantage of the weak and feeble ſituation of Iſrael at the time. Many years after this, the ſame people, perſevering, no doubt, in their idolatry and iniquities, the order was given for their immediate deſtruction, and it is then particularly mentioned,

* See Ainſworth in loc.—A later writer hath ſuggeſted the following tranſlation: 'For he ſaid, becauſe my hand hath been 'upon the enſign of the Lord [the miraculous rod, ver. 9.] ſo 'Jehovah will have war with Amalek,' &c.

† See Judges v. 13. ‡ Deut. xxv. 17, 18.

mentioned, that they 'laid wait for Iſrael by the 'way, when he came up from Egypt *.' After reading theſe paſſages, I hope you will not again aſſert, that the only crime of the Amalekites was 'reſiſting their invaders,' ſince they never were invaded by the Iſraelites; but, coming voluntarily and treacherouſly upon them, were the aggreſſors againſt them, as well as by their impiety enemies to God.

But you object, it was not the ſame generation of men who committed the offence that ſuffered the puniſhment: True, Sir, but it is a maxim, both with the God of Iſrael, and the God of Providence, 'to viſit the ſins of the fathers upon the children,' when the children copy the iniquities of their parents †.

From the hiſtory of the Amalekites you paſs immediately to the *imprecations* in the *pſalms*, connecting them in this manner. 'We need not, 'ſurely (you ſay) be ſurpriſed that the Jewiſh 'people have been characteriſed by the qualities 'of cruelty and malice. Nevertheleſs we find 'theſe qualities appearing ſometimes where we 'ſhould not expect it:—we find them in their '*devotions*.'

This

* 1 Sam. xv. 2. † See Age of Infidel. Part I. p. 51.

This is not an age to be ſurpriſed at any thing, much leſs at a groundleſs accuſation; and ſuch, in great meaſure, I conſider this againſt the Jews; ſince I know of no reaſon for believing them to be more cruel or malicious than were the moſt boaſted nations of antiquity. Of this I am certain, that there were ſeveral things in their religion, and in the conduct of God toward them, intended to ſoften and civilize them, as well as to make them religious: I will ſlightly mention a few.

1. In the Jewiſh law there were ſeveral precepts inculcating, not only love to their brethren, but pity to ſtrangers, compaſſion to enemies, and mercy to the brute creation, as may be ſeen in the texts below referred to *.

2. It appears to be one deſign of Providence in permitting their ſlavery in Egypt, to teach them ſympathy and compaſſion †.

3. There are many inſtances in the ſacred books of theſe virtues, particularly of mercy to enemies—as in the conduct of David toward Saul ‡.

4. It

* Exod. xxii. 21—27. xxiii. 4—9. Deut. xxii. 1—10. xxiv. 10—22. † Exod. xxiii. 9. ‡ 1 Sam. xxiv.

4. It muſt be admitted, however, there was a difference between Judaiſm and Chriſtianity: the character of the latter is mercy and benevolence, of the former, equity and juſtice. We are taught to forgive, and pray for the ſalvation of our enemies: They went no farther, in general, than to pray for juſtice. Paul ſpeaks the language of the old diſpenſation, when he ſays of Alexander the copperſmith, 'the Lord reward him according to 'his works;' but the language of the new, when he ſpeaks juſt afterward of the deſertion of his timid friends,—'I pray God that it may not be laid 'to their charge*;' in both caſes, I ſuppoſe, his mind and pen equally under a divine ſuperintendancy.

5. In the paſſages which ſeem moſt bitter, the Pſalmiſt prays not for the eternal ruin of his enemies, but for their temporal deſtruction†; and as God was the King of Iſrael, and they were under a particular providence, as a theocracy, this was nothing more than an application to the ſupreme magiſtrate for juſtice.

6. In

* 1 Tim. iv. 14, 16.

† Pſ. lv. 15. Indeed ſays, 'Let death ſeize upon them, and let them go down quick into hell;'—but the margin, reads more properly 'the grave,'—the alluſion is to an earthquake.

6. In ſome caſes, I obſerve, where the ſevereſt judgments are imprecated, it is with a view to their reform and converſion:—'Fill their faces 'with ſhame; that they may ſeek thy name, O 'Lord *.'—In other inſtances I remark, that his prayer goes no farther than to the diſappointment of their ſchemes:—'Ariſe, O Lord, diſappoint him:'—'Let them be confounded and put to 'ſhame †.'

7. In moſt caſes I believe it would be found, upon minute examination, that the Pſalmiſt is not ſpeaking of his private or perſonal enemies, but of thoſe of the church and ſtate; and that he does not ſpeak as a ſimple individual, but as a prophet. And it is in this light that thoſe pſalms are cited in the New Teſtament ‡.

8. Accordingly, almoſt the whole of the imprecatory paſſages might more literally be rendered as predictions; for the Hebrews have the imperative mood in the ſecond perſon only; conſequently all paſſages which are in the third perſon, either ſingular or plural, are not, in the Hebrew, in the imperative, but in the future; and might all be ſo rendered, when the other ſenſe appears exceptionable. Indeed the whole of the pſalms

* Pſ. lxxxiii. 16. † Pſ. xvii. 13. xxxv. 4.

‡ See Pſalm lxix. cix. &c.

pſalms moſt objected againſt, are rendered in the future, as prophecies inſtead of imprecations, by Biſhop HORNE, and other of the beſt Hebrew critics.

III. Your laſt objection is formed from 'the 'difficulty attending the very notion of miracles 'and revelation *;' that is, you mean to ſay, that theſe things are 'antecedently improbable,' though 'not abſolutely incredible †.' I hardly need, Sir, to point out to a philoſopher of your penetration, the weakneſs, and I will add, the inadmiſſibility of this method of reaſoning. The ſcriptures alledge miracles and revelation as facts, atteſted by a variety of credible eye and ear witneſſes: you admit they are 'not abſolutely incredible;' nay, you confeſs that ſuppoſing the Chriſtian Revelation to be *falſe*, 'both the conduct of the 'apoſtles and the rapid ſucceſs of chriſtianity are 'unaccountable;' all you object is, that theſe facts are 'antecedently improbable!' But 'facts are 'ſtubborn things,' Sir, and will not yield to probability, nor give way to theory, or hypotheſis. A great number of exiſting facts, both in hiſtory and philoſophy, were 'antecedently improbable.' If intelligent creatures exiſted before moral evil (as will not be denied) that muſt have been to them the greateſt of all *antecedent improbabilities*; yea,

* Reaſons for Scep. p. 24. † Ibid. p. 28.

yea, I doubt not it muſt have appeared impoſſible. That a magnet ſhould attract iron, that it ſhould point always to the poles, and eſpecially, that it ſhould by attrition communicate that power to a needle, are facts 'antecedently improbable;' but that it ſhould be poſſible for human art to form artificial magnets muſt have ſeemed antecedently impoſſible. The like may be ſaid of a thouſand phenomena of nature, and of ten thouſand circumſtances in providence: What then is the weight of your antecedent improbability?

But, weak as this objection is, I am perſuaded that it is alſo unfounded; and that neither miracles nor revelation are any otherwiſe antecedently improbable, than as they are extraordinary, which is implied in the term *miracles*.

The deſirableneſs of Revelation is generally admitted, even by thoſe who deny the fact. *Socrates*, the wiſeſt of heathen ſages, not only felt this, and thought the thing 'antecedently probable;' but perſuaded himſelf that it would take place, and led his diſciples to look and wait for ſo deſirable an event *.

Mr. *Hume*, though an avowed enemy to Chriſtianity, ſeems to admit ſome kind of Revelation

* Plato in Alcibiade 2.

lation highly deſirable and antecedently probable. 'The moſt natural ſentiment (he ſays) 'which a well-diſpoſed mind will feel on this 'occaſion, is a longing deſire and expectation, 'that heaven would be pleaſed to diſſipate, or 'at leaſt alleviate, this profound ignorance, by 'affording ſome more particular Revelation to 'mankind, and making diſcoveries of the nature, 'attributes, and operation of the divine object 'of ou faith. A perſon ſeaſoned with a juſt 'ſenſe of the *imperfection of natural reaſon* will fly 'to *revealed truth* with the greateſt avidity. To 'be a philoſophical *Sceptic* is, in a man of letters, 'the firſt and moſt eſſential ſtep towards being a 'ſound and believing Chriſtian *.'—I wiſh, Sir, you may be an inſtance in point to prove the truth and juſtneſs of the laſt remark!

But your objections ſeem levelled, not ſo much againſt the probability of *any* Revelation, as againſt *that* contained in the ſcriptures. You are particularly offended with that kind of colloqual diſcourſe, which paſſed between the Deity and Abraham, Moſes, &c.—It is, to be ſure, very becoming ſuch creatures as we are, to dictate to the Supreme Being, what kind of a Revelation we pleaſe to accept of! or what is the moſt ſuitable language for our Maker! But paſſing

* Dialogues on Natural Religion, page 363.

paſſing this abſurdity, I conceive there is nothing unworthy of Deity, but rather highly honourable to his character, in aſſuming a viſible and created form, that his glory may not overpower us—or in ſpeaking to us in our own language, as a parent to his children. 'Thus ſaith the high 'and lofty One that inhabiteth Eternity, whoſe 'name is Holy! I dwell in the high and holy 'place; with him alſo that is of a contrite and 'humble ſpirit, to revive the ſpirit of the humble, 'and to revive the heart of the contrite ones*.' Surely this is an idea every way becoming the Infinite Deity, the Univerſal Parent; and to this may be reduced the whole of the Old Teſtament appearances, though, in the compaſs of a pamphlet, it is not poſſible to examine them ſeparately and minutely.

If God were pleaſed to reveal himſelf, it is antecedently probable he would ſeal the diſcovery by ſome extraordinary events or circumſtances, as marks and evidences of the divine power: theſe would be miraculous, and thence the antecedent credibility of miracles. Objections to the number, or particular circumſtances of theſe events, are trifling and inconſiderable, and the whole controverſy, reſpecting miracles, has been ſo fully and ably diſcuſſed on both ſides, that

* Iſaiah lvii. 15.

that ſcarcely any thing more can be expected on either: in me it would be folly to attempt it.

Having thus far examined, and, in ſome meaſure at leaſt, as I would hope, obviated your objections to Chriſtianity, permit me now to offer a few arguments in its favour. You will not expect, me on this occaſion, to enter into the general evidences of Chriſtianity, eſpecially as you are acquainted with the recent and maſterly writings of Biſhop WATSON and Mr. PALEY. I ſhall confine myſelf therefore to a few hints of arguments, which might be derived from the ſame topics which have furniſhed your objections, and which may ſerve to ſhew that we have no reaſon to fear any diſcuſſions connected with this ſubject.

I. My firſt argument is derived from the *character* of CHRIST.—I conceive no impoſtor would have advanced a ſyſtem of morals ſo ſtrictly pure, and even ſeverely holy, as are thoſe of the New Teſtament. The thing is not probable in itſelf, nor have we any inſtance in fact to render it ſo. *Mahomet* certainly, in many things, conſulted the taſte and paſſions of his followers, and owed great part of his ſucceſs to the corporeal indulgencies he gave them, particularly as to women. Other ſectaries have indeed made great pretenſions to ſanctity;

ſanctity; but it has been chiefly in external ſhew. If they have faſted, it has been that they might appear unto men to faſt. If they have prayed, it has not been in the ſecret chamber. In ſhort, their regard has been confined chiefly to externals; and their religion has not been the religion of the heart.

Neither would an impoſtor have paſſed ſo ſevere a cenſure on his own countrymen. He might have condemned the heathen, and nothing would have been more likely to ingratiate himſelf with the Jews: but, on the contrary, Jeſus taught that it would be 'more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment,' than for his unbelieving countrymen.

It is probable, then, from theſe conſiderations (for I am now ſtating probabilities) that Jeſus was *not an impoſtor*; becauſe it is not probable that an impoſtor would have acted thus. But if Jeſus was not an impoſtor, he muſt have been what he pretended to be, the *Meſſiah* ſent by God; and, conſequently, Chriſtianity muſt be true.

Indeed the character of an impoſtor is in itſelf ſo deteſtable and criminal, that I find ſceptical, and even deiſtical writers, very unwilling to

apply it to Jeſus Chriſt. *Rouſſeau*, the excentrical Rouſſeau, prefers him infinitely to Socrates. Even *Thomas Paine*, in the firſt part of his Age of Reaſon, calls him a 'virtuous and amiable reformer;' and, in the ſecond part, ſeems to think it more reaſonable to queſtion his exiſtence than his virtue *.—You, Sir, have ſaid ſeveral things honourable to Chriſt and Chriſtianity. It is your 'ſincere opinion that a purer, a more dignified, 'or a more amiable religion was never exhibited 'to the ſons of men, than we find in what is 'called the Lord's Prayer, in the parable of the 'prodigal, and other parts of Chriſt's diſcourſes †.' Now, Sir, if Jeſus were wiſer than Socrates, and his religion ſo very pure, dignified, and amiable, is it not poſſible that you, who do not claim a character of ſuch diſtinguiſhed wiſdom and excellence, may be miſtaken in your conceptions of the propriety and truth of other parts of his doctrine, rather than that ſo divine a teacher ſhould groſsly contradict himſelf in his fundamental principles? Is it not poſſible that even the ſcripture doctrine of future puniſhment may be more worthy of the Divine Being, than is conſiſtent with your pre-conceived opinions, or (in another word) your prejudices?

It

* See Age of Infidelity, Part I. p. 22. Part II. p. 124.

† Reaſons for Scept. p. 33. See alſo p. 35.

It ſeems to me, that this ſingle conſideration of the character of Chriſt might be ſufficient to decide, as to the truth of Chriſtianity. For if Jeſus Chriſt were only a wiſe and good man, it ſeems impoſſible to ſuppoſe he could form the deſign of impoſing a falſe religion upon mankind; and to ſay that he was not ſuch, ſeems to ſhock the feelings even of the hardieſt advocates of infidelity.

This alſo appears deciſive as to the queſtion of miracles. It is certain on all hands, by the confeſſion of Jews and Heathens, as well as Chriſtians, that Jeſus pretended to miraculous powers, and actually did many wonderful things. Now, if Jeſus Chriſt did work miracles, there is an end of the queſtion; if he did not, he could not be a wiſe and good man, but a juggler and impoſtor; which is a ſuppoſition too ſhocking to common ſenſe (as well as piety) to be openly maintained; and yet there is no medium. Admit, therefore, but the moral character of Chriſt, and ſo much of his extraordinary powers as was admitted by his Jewiſh and Pagan enemies—add, that he ſuffered and died in confirmation of his doctrines, and that his apoſtles did the ſame—and you have difficulties to account for in rejecting Chriſtianity, much greater than what are to

be

be found in it, becauſe they are not difficulties of theory, but of *fact*.

II. The *Hiſtory of the Jews*, from firſt to laſt, affords ſtrong evidences of a divine interpoſition, and conſequently in favour of revelation. Their riſe, rapid increaſe in ſlavery, deliverance from Egypt, ſojourning in the wilderneſs, conqueſt of Canaan, ſafety and proſperity in obedience, calamity and ſufferings for diſobedience, theſe are all topics fruitful of argument. To theſe may be added, that their origin, and all the changes of their fate and circumſtances, were plainly marked out in ancient prophecy, as hath been excellently ſhewn by Biſhop *Newton*. But the moſt deciſive and wonderful circumſtance in their hiſtory, is the deſtruction of their city, and conſequent diſperſion, with their diſtinct preſervation to the preſent time, in exact harmony with the predictions of our Saviour. It was this induced Mr. *Addiſon* to conſider every Jew as an evidence for Chriſtianity, which indeed he is, of the moſt unexceptionable nature, his teſtimony being that of an enemy, and not delivered verbally but in *fact*.

III. I might reaſon from the *antecedent probability of a Divine Revelation*, conſidering its utility to us, in connection with the benevolence of the Deity.

I have

I have already touched upon this ſubject, in anſwering your third objection. The neceſſity and importance of a divine revelation hath been very ably argued by Dr. *Leland*, and other learned advocates of Chriſtianity, whoſe writings I doubt not but you have conſulted, and whoſe arguments muſt, I think, make ſome impreſſion on a reader of your penetration and intelligence.—Suppoſing a divine revelation, many reaſons might be given for its being communicated to individuals, rather than to mankind at large; and for thoſe individuals not being, for the moſt part, princes, heroes, or philoſophers, but men of plain underſtanding, of and ſimple modes of life, ſuch as were the firſt preachers of chriſtianity.

It might be ſhewn highly neceſſary and proper, that theſe communications ſhould be evidenced to others by ſuch extraordinary events as we call *miracles*, which are only deviations from the uſual courſe of nature and providence. It is admitted that the univerſe is a great *machine*, and governed, in general, by laws as certain and invariable as the principles of mechanics: yet ſurely, he that made this wonderful machine is at liberty, if he think proper, to put his hand upon it, to ſuſpend or invert its motions on particular occaſions, and in ſo doing, without confuſion, or injury to the work, he unqueſtionably demonſtrates

demonſtrates his power and wiſdom even more than in the uniform regularity of its motions.

There is a ſtriking and beautiful *analogy* between all the works and ways of God with which we are acquainted. The *analogy between natural* and *revealed religion* hath been very fully ſhewn, and ably reaſoned from, by the late Biſhop *Butler*, whoſe excellent work on that ſubject has not, I dare ſay, eſcaped your reading and attention. This analogy is much in favour of revelation; becauſe it ſhews that God has conſtructed the natural and moral world on ſimilar plans, and governs them by nearly the ſame laws. Inſomuch, that moſt of the objections to revelation will apply with equal force (as I have endeavoured to ſhew Mr. *Paine* *), againſt the religion of nature, and the being and attributes of God.

Chriſtianity, however, goes much farther than the religion of nature, and may be *conſidered* as a *ſequel* to it. Some truths, common to both, appear more clearly and with ſuperior evidence in revelation; and others are thereby diſcovered which were before unknown. The doctrine of redemption is in itſelf (however ridiculed,) of more value than all the diſcoveries of nature, and more honourable to the divine perfections.

Revelation

* Age of Infidelity, Part II. p. 100—107.

Revelation gives light to ſeveral queſtions of the firſt importance, on which nature is invariably ſilent; and where both ſpeak on the ſame ſubject, the language of Scripture is ſo much clearer, and more ſatisfactory, as to admit of no compariſon: this is particularly the caſe on the ſubjects of the origin of evil, the divine placability, the method of reconciliation to God, and the nature of our future exiſtence. As revelation excels in evidence, ſo does it, conſequently, in the peace and comfort it affords under the various trials of human life, and eſpecially in the hour of death *.

One other circumſtance worthy of remark to you, as a friend of literature and philoſophy, is, that Revelation perfectly harmonizes with every recent diſcovery in the ſublime ſciences, and in the hiſtory of ancient nations; and acquires ſtrength from every real acceſſion to the knowledge of mankind. This might be particularly inſtanced in the modern theory of aſtronomy, electricity, and the late reſearches into Aſiatic literature: and, paradoxical as it may ſeem, I am not afraid to aſſert, there are more occaſional hints of modern diſcoveries and improvements in the Bible, than in the works of the immortal *Bacon*.

IV. Another

* See Age of Infidelity, Part II. p. 116—121.

IV. Another argument may be drawn from the tendency of *partial* to *univerſal* ſcepticiſm: I mean that the ſame principles which lead us to doubt and deny the truth of revealed religion, would lead us farther to queſtion the truth of *all* religion. This is not mere hypotheſis, but has been realized in many unhappy inſtances of perſons who have degenerated from true chriſtianity to falſe, from thence to Deiſm, to Atheiſm, and even univerſal Scepticiſm.

It is eaſy to trace this tendency through all the arguments for infidelity. I will give a few inſtances. I have juſt obſerved above, that many of the objections to Revelation apply alſo in a greater or leſs degree to natural religion: and conſequently the ſame mode of reaſoning, purſued a little farther, would carry us to Atheiſm. The ſame method by which Deiſts get rid of the evidences of Revelation, Atheiſts employ to get rid of Theiſm. And the ſame libertine conduct and principles, which lead men to wiſh, and hope, and conclude, that the Bible is a fable, will lead them alſo to wiſh, and hope, and conclude the ſame, as to the doctrines of a Deity and a future ſtate.

Scepticiſm has a no leſs evil tendency in *civil* matters. The undervaluing credible teſtimony in

in favour of Revelation, leads to univerſal diſtruſt among mankind. If we are to believe nothing but what we ſee with our own eyes, or hear with our own ears, adieu to all hiſtory, eſpecially that of early times. For if twelve men are not to be believed in facts they uniformly atteſt, as having ſeen and heard, and after having ſealed their teſtimony with their blood, where ſhall we find evidence to be depended on as the materials of authentic hiſtory?

But I ſuppoſe the moſt general temptation to infidelity, among men of a literary and ſpeculative turn, is the ambition of accounting for every thing on natural and philoſophic principles.

'In pride, in reaſoning pride, our error lies,
'All quit their ſphere and ruſh into the ſkies.
'Pride ſtill is aiming at the bleſt abodes,
'Men would be angels, angels would be gods:
'Aſpiring to be gods, if angels fell,
'Aſpiring to be angels, men rebel.'

POPE.

The great teacher of Chriſtianity lays it down for a firſt principle in his religion, that we muſt 'be converted, and become as little children *,' ere we can be admitted as his genuine diſciples. To

* Matt. xviii. 3. xix. 14. &c.

To be converted is to be regenerated *. This new birth is the beginning of a new life, communicated by the grace of God, and which places us as infants in the hand of our heavenly parent; who inſtructs us, in many reſpects, as the wiſeſt and beſt of us do our young children; and requires of us that ſame kind of diſpoſition which we expect from them. Now if we expect our children to receive inſtruction (as we often neceſſarily do) with implicit credit, and very properly aſſure them that many things are true and right, the propriety or fitneſs of which they are by no means capable of comprehending, why ſhould not our heavenly Father demand the ſame from us? If this is but 'the infancy of being,' ſurely the ſimplicity of children better becomes us than either dogmatiſm or incredulity.

Your letter concludes with hoping, that your chriſtian friends will ſtill permit you to indulge the proſpect of a future and more perfect ſtate. Your 'chriſtian friends' would certainly wiſh you to enjoy all the comfort and felicity of ſuch views; but at the ſame time, Sir, they muſt be concerned to ſee you looking weſtward for the riſing ſun. It is by the Goſpel that 'life and immortality are 'brought to light;' thither therefore may your views be again directed! May the Sun of righteouſneſs

* John iii. 1—8.

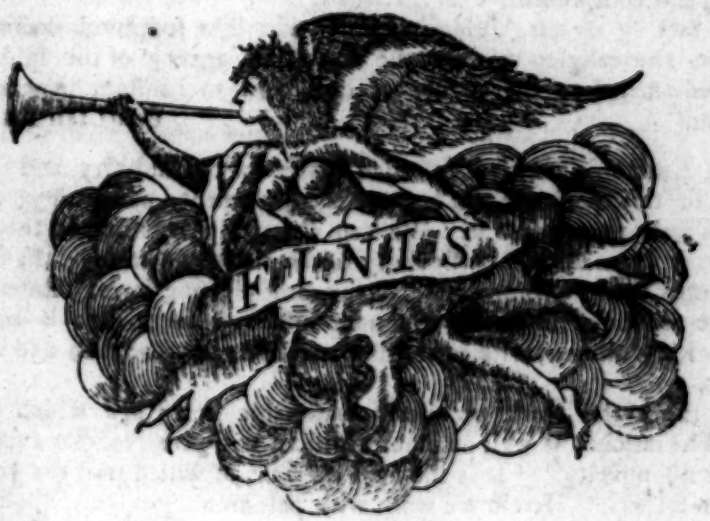
ouſneſs diſpel the gloomy apprehenſions that diſturb your preſent peace—may all your remaining days be gilded by his beams—and may this glory and happineſs give place only to that which is eternal!

Such, Sir, are the prayers and wiſhes with which I have the honour moſt cordially to ſubſcribe myſelf,

Your friend and ſervant

in the cauſe of truth,

T. W.



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